MY EYES HAVE A COLD NOSE

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My Eyes Have a Cold Nose

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(*With additions by the author*)

I MET my eyes some weeks ago. We were formally introduced at the Seeing Eye establishment in Morristown, N. J., to which I had just come for the month of training in the use of a guide dog. My eyes acknowledged the introduction with the kind of snort made only by a friendly male boxer and the touch of a very cold and very broad nose. When told that his name was "Wizard," I said, not too cleverly, "I hope it fits."

Four months before, my vision was as good as anyone's. Then suddenly my retinas began to detach from their proper position. The surgeons did their best, but I was discharged after three months as totally and permanently blind.

I had been a difficult patient. Your friends tell you, soothingly, that everything is going to be all right, but you know that everything isn't going to be all right if you don't do something to make it so.

I was more fortunate than most in my predicament; I had been a writer for 15 years, a profession that does not depend absolutely on vision. I had lost neither my skill nor my knowledge. A good secretary could furnish the connection between these and the page. There remained the problem of mobility. The greatest burden of the blind is often the complete dependence for movement upon the good will of others.

Therefore I needed no urging to consider getting a guide dog. Before I left the Infirmary, my application had been entered at Seeing Eye, Inc., and their representative had called on me. But this does not imply that I was altogether easy in my mind about the efficacy of the dog as the full answer to my problem. It seemed incredible that anyone would dare try crossing, say, Lexington Avenue in New York City at high noon with only a small animal to guide him.

I was familiar enough with the story of Seeing Eye beginning hardly two decades ago at Mrs. Dorothy Eustis' estate in Switzerland and with its 16 years of existence in the United States. I was willing to grant that a dog was the nearest substitute for sight. Trouble was, I had perhaps heard too much. Anything having to do with dogs seems to invite the fabulous touch, and I reserved judgment until the day my dog and I would try that first crossing of Lexington Avenue. I had had dogs and loved them, but even how to break one of chasing cars or teaching one to do anything more useful than bringing home the paper had been beyond me.

I needn't have been so skeptical. Now, although Wizard has his off days when he would rather take a bus than walk in the rain, and so informs me by plain balking, usually he takes

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hand in writing peace terms with Germany. In this gathering the Old Man has become a powerful factor. When there are strong differences of opinion he invariably calms the waters. "Now look," he says, raising a magisterial hand. "This is what we're really after." And when he finishes explaining, the issue is always clear.

"He is imperturbable," was one Englishman's tribute. "He is alw fair; his reasoning is precise, and never says anything unless he kn what he's talking about."

"There is a man — your Admira a prominent Frenchman told "He is honest, that one. One can fool him. But he is always ready help if one's request is justified."

It was a just accolade, I thought a great American.

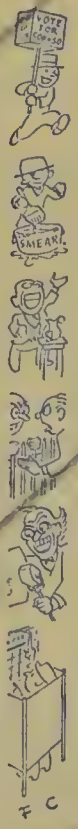
Thoughts for an Election Year

AMERICA is the only country which has ever held a national election successfully in the midst of an all-out war. We did it in the Civil War and we shall do it again. Yet it imposes great responsibilities upon every citizen.

As the political fever rises, we shall be tempted to behave like spoiled children, calling each other names, attributing to each other the most horrid motives, dividing our national community with unnecessary hatreds. To whatever extent we get viciously angry, to that same extent we shall fail to pool our national wisdom and make the great decisions which lie ahead with the best intelligence the whole nation can bring to bear.

The American people want to do what is right — Republicans and Democrats, labor and business and farmers, blacks and whites, members of all religions. And we can bridge the gap between our desire to do right and our human ignorance of how to do it, if we impose upon ourselves the democratic self-discipline which will help us learn from one another.

Every morning we must remind ourselves that our neighbors may be



right, that we may be wrong, or t we may both be wrong, and that if talk to each other without gett angry we may discover an opin which is better than either could h devised alone. We tend to talk as if believed that the other political pa or the other racial background, or other way of making a living, something which made our neighb unfit to take part in a sensible disc sion of what we all ought to do; underneath all the campaign froth still believe in each other. Why behave as if we did?

It will be a bad day for democr when people don't get excited ab an election. But there is a differe between excitement and rancor. Am ica must hold a presidential elect It is up to us to decide whether behave like adults or like brats. If behave like grownups, and argue v each other only for the sake of creasing our common stock of wisd the schoolbooks of the next cent will say we were a great generatio Americans, capable of creating an breakable national unity at the tim our severest national trial.

— Herbert Agar in *This Week Mag*

ne wherever I want to go. I walk rom my home to Fifth Avenue, cross- ng Lexington, Park and Madison, as safely as I ever did and twice as fre- quently. Because Wizard needs exer- cise, I get out more often than I used to. Special legislation in New York State permits us to go together on all transportation systems. The public is stubbornly of the opinion that I am going to get killed in revolving doors, and I always have to explain to some- one that I'm not.

We go to restaurants for lunch or dinner. When I am seated, Wizard downs obediently at my feet. Occa- sionally head waiters are outraged at the very thought of a dog. At such times Wizard and I do not bother to explain that Seeing Eye has taken special pains to show us how to be- have at table; we don't argue because other restaurants are glad to have us.

We attract a great deal of atten- tion, but Wizard and I are a couple of hams and we love it. He weighs a little over 60 pounds, has a sort of brindle coat — they tell me — and a curiously black, wrinkled face. He has a habit of keeping his tongue lolled out and exposing his teeth in a way that quickly clears the path for us. His ferocious appearance belies his character, though. I have never heard him bark. He is a sensitive creature, susceptible to moods, and I have to be bright and cheerful with him, or he gets worried about me. When *he* isn't cheerful I worry about *him*, so we are well matched. They have an apt phrase at Seeing Eye: the dog doesn't belong to you, you belong to the dog.

The dogs are not only "trained" to work for the blind, they must be per- suaded. And they have to be kept persuaded.

Snow lay on the ground the Febru- ary day I enrolled with 15 other blind from all parts of the United States. Four of them were Negro, one was a Latin American. Two were service men, four were women. Three were returning after years for their second or third dogs. We were divided into two groups, each with its instructor.

I was taken upstairs to the com- fortable room I would share with an- other, told where to hang my clothes, shown the bathroom, the recreation room and the way to the dining hall. After that I was expected to find things for myself. If you lose a sock or a shoe you can ask someone to help you find it, but you must make your own search first. You butter your own bread, cut your own meat; if you complain that you have never done these things before, you are told it's about time you started.

No one can give a man independ- ence; he must find it for himself. This is part of the philosophy of Seeing Eye. Every important member of the staff has spent at least one month living the life of a blind person, his vision cut off by a close-fitting black mask, until he, too, knows what it is to be without sight. Sympathy, therefore, is not excluded but pity is.

We found this atmosphere curi- ously refreshing. The staff treated us as complete equals and it was a wel- come relief after the condolences of relatives and friends. I had thought the rule a silly one that visitors could see us for only two hours on Saturdays and Sundays. I hadn't counted on going into retreat, too. But the inept touch of the public, which so often

dog is doing something wrong, and when the dog resumes doing things the correct way the praise must be unmistakable.

What makes the dog finally decide to assume full responsibility seems to be beyond human understanding. He will go to sleep under his master's bed at Seeing Eye one night without it and the next morning awaken with it. From that point on the master is safe. He can cross any street or proceed up the most crowded sidewalk with assurance. His period of training, except for a few technical pointers, is over. He is ready to go home.

Graduation at Seeing Eye is casual. There are no diplomas. We go to the Executive Offices to pay our bill, though. Now we meet a last manifestation of Seeing Eye's philosophy of sympathy without pity. Our dogs might as well be given to us for nothing, the discrepancy is so great between what they have cost and what we will pay. The cost is six or seven times what we will be charged, but we are told only the price to us: $150. The men who come for their second or third dogs pay $50. The cost to service men is $1.

Wizard is now my dog, or rather I am Wizard's man, but I can't say I am any hero to him. He insists upon regular mealtimes, and when I stay overlong on visits he doesn't hesitate to let me know that we should be going. When my temper flares he just sits on his broad bottom until it blows over. For some unfathomable reason he loves bars and is not helping my reputation by occasionally turning into one without an order from me.

The other day I was at an advertising agency discussing the probability of doing a certain radio script which, as we say in the business, was very commercial. Wizard lay quietly beside me on the floor, as he had been trained to do, for as long as he could, then got up, stretched, walked to a corner and unobtrusively threw up. His air indicated that although he was responsible for me he didn't have to like my material.

People still try to help us cross the street and we thank them politely. But I don't need their help any more. For Wizard has given me back the thing I value most — my independence.

The big burden of our lives is that everybody kind of expects us to do tricks. I am supposed to have learned something about dog training. Then why can't I teach Wizard to do things like walking erect and shaking hands? It's a simple principle, I am told; it rests upon the superiority of the human mind over the animal. I tried to apply that principle. I didn't succeed in teaching Wizard any tricks but how would you like to see me scratch my right ear with my left hind foot?

THE only real argument for marriage is that it remains the best method for getting acquainted. — Heywood Broun, *It Seems to Me* (Harcourt, Brace)

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